

October 21, 2014

Emily Cox  
Principal  
Mather Elementary School  
1 Parish Street  
Dorchester, MA 02122

Dear Principal Cox,

It is with great pleasure that I join your state and local officials and President Obama in recognizing the 375<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Mather School, the oldest free public elementary school in North America. I hope you will be kind enough to pass along to your students this message:

Congratulations, and I hope you feel truly proud today. Your state, Massachusetts, has helped our entire country understand what excellence is in education. And your school is all about the things that make America great. When the founders of Mather started the school back in 1639 – well before the founding of the United States, and even before George Washington was born – they probably couldn't have imagined the world we live in today. In that world, every single young person needs a great education – and your school understands that.

Your school stands for opportunity for every single child. You don't just say the Mather School Pledge in English – you also say it in Vietnamese, Cape Verdean Creole, and Spanish. That's because you know that all of us are part of this country, and every child deserves a great chance.

You know that play and healthy lifestyles are part of a great education – which is why you have outdoor classrooms and three playgrounds and grow your own vegetables.

You know that education doesn't just happen during the school day, which is why you have a Saturday Academy that offers science, technology, and art.

You know that school begins with pre-kindergarten, which many of you attended, and school isn't over until you go to college – which is why you've named your classrooms after the college your teachers attended.

You, and your teachers and staff, are truly part of America's history, joining hundreds of thousands of alumni over the generations.

And I know that you will make good on their hard work, by going to college, graduating, and returning to inspire the next class of students.

Thank you for continuing to do amazing things within your school walls, as well as throughout the school community. Happy Birthday – and many more!

Best,

Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education